

A PAIR OF CRANKS.

By H. M. GREENE.

CHAPTER VII.

SCHEMES, MATRIMONIAL, MERCENARY AND MISCELLANEOUS.

"I never like to chaw my terbakker twice," continued the old man, "but 'f I'm any jedge of matters 'n things 'neow's the day an' 'neow's the hour,' as 'Scott's whay bay with Wallace bled,' to take up that ere motion which was laid onto the table at a previous session, bein', as I was wonce a select-man. I'm not an unborn child in parleymenty doin's; quite the contrary, eh, Mr. Calvin?"

Calvin considered a moment, and then said that they were much obliged to their friend for his offer, but had decided that they would marry themselves. "In plain terms," he explained, "neither of us believe in the sanctity of the marriage relation. We agree that it is nothing more than nor less than a civil contract between a man and a woman who agree to live together during mutual satisfaction. But contracts require witnesses, so if you will consent to act as a witness to our contract we will write out and sign one now."

"But ye know," urged the old man, "if anybody should question the marriage it would be so much stronger if I could throw in a few words in a religious way, jinin' yer hands an' so on."

"Thank you," Nettie answered. "We shall be just as surely united without any forms whatever. In fact, I do not altogether like the idea of a written contract, but Charles thinks it best, so to oblige him I consent. He is a lawyer, and, of course, knows more upon these subjects."

The old man withdrew into the small room which Nettie had occupied, and soon returned with pens, ink and paper, which he laid beside Calvin on the table. Thus reminded, the young man wrote, after many changes, interpolations and erasures, the following:

CONTRACT BETWEEN NETTIE FORD AND CHARLES CALVIN, RESIDENTS OF THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND.

We, the subscribers, citizens of the United States of America, of mature age and sound mind, do hereby agree to unite our lives and possessions, to recognize each the other as an equal partner in all the rights and privileges of this partnership, to respect each other's opinions, to guard and defend each other, and so to live together until perfect harmony and thought and action is no longer possible, when we agree to separate and dissolve this contract amicably and without the interposition of law.

We each agree to these conditions, and taken thereof hereby affix our signatures, this 12th day of December, in the ninety-ninth year of American Independence in the town of East Greenwood, county of Blackstone, state of Rhode Island and Providence plantations, United States of America.

CHARLES CALVIN.
NETTIE FORD.

Witness: HABAKKUK SHROUDS.

When Calvin finished reading this document, Mr. Shrouds, in some faint memory of his ecclesiastical duty on past marital ceremonies, observed in a low tone feebly flavored by a devotional quaver, "And the Lord hev mercy on your souls," at which both the contracting parties laughed heartily. When the contract had been signed by the principals, and by himself as witness, he sat for some time in deep thought, then feebly shaking his head, poked the fire violently, and returning to his chair, gazed upon the long, red tongues which were darting up the black chimney and out into the

cold, stormy night. He could make nothing of it—this business agreement, so different from the solemn and ceremonial rites with which he had been ever familiar.

"Ye see," he unconsciously spoke his thought, "ye see, it might hev been a partnership in a store—nothin' more, nothin' less. I swan I don't understand it; folks is so dogon new fashioned these days. I can't keep up."

"Mr. Shrouds," said Calvin, rising and standing with his back to the fire, "you have been a dear, good friend to us to-night. I know that neither Miss Ford or myself would do anything purposely to wound you. We regard the marriage relation, as I told you, as a civil contract, and we have executed that contract."

"I know, I know," said the old man, "that's all right, but you're so cool about it. Why, even Gypsies jump over a broomstick when they wed. You didn't even kiss your bride."

"I am always ready to perform that duty," Calvin answered good humoredly, and advanced toward Nettie, who met him half way, and the salute was exchanged. In a spirit of mirthfulness Nettie went on, threw her arms around the old man's neck, and gave him a hearty kiss also.

"I yum," he exclaimed, thoroughly aroused and delighted, "that 'ere beats all. Haint hed such a buss since long afore the war—wall, wall!" and the greatful old soul spread his lean hands toward the leaping blaze and seemed to bathe them in the flaming flood which flowed so evenly and cheerily into the outer winter air. Yet he could not repress a sigh, which his guests, observing, truly interpreted, and after a short consultation, Calvin laid his hand on the old man's shoulder, and said:

"My dear sir, no thought of opposing your wishes crossed our minds in this matter. We have had our choice, and a civil contract is completed. Now we are willing to defer readily to your desire, and ask you to marry us according to your form. After all, the blessing of an old man can do no harm, as the Pope told a pretty Puritan."

The Reverend Habakkuk Shrouds rose instantly to the occasion. Whether this marriage ceremony was numbered one or 100 on his list, no one could determine by his bearing.

"Jine yer right hands," he ordered, as a general might order up a division of reserves.

The command obeyed, he strode in front of the pair, and demanded in a voice of great depth and volume, if any one present knew of any impediment or other reason why these parties here present should not be joined in holy matrimony. He waited a suitable time for a possible response, and then, as though relieved by the resulting silence, went on:

"You, an' each of you, in the presence of Almighty Gawd and Hiram Abiff, do hereby declare and publish that you take each other as man and wife to walk together in peace an' love and leavin' all other men an' wives to keep true to each other in sickness an' in health, in prosperity and in poverty, in life an' in death, so help you Gawd." Despite the somewhat eclectic nature of the declaration, each of the parties recognized quaint sincerity and dignity

in it, and responded affirmatively. The ceremony closed by a long and fervent invocation, and with outstretched hands uplifted over the bowed heads of the pair.

At the conclusion, and after the second bridal kiss had been exchanged, the old man uttered a subdued "Hallelujah!" a mellowed echo of the blatant cries of the conventicles to which he had once ministered, and went about his household tasks, quietly, but with an air of dignity which was quite noticeable.

But the consent of the young people to this daring "scheme" made them masters of his heart, and of his unbounded confidence. So after dinner he proceeded at length to unfold a plan he had formed by which he and his friends might become marvelously rich. In the interest of economy of time and space, for these people have each a part to play in stirring scenes in the course of this narrative, it will be advisable to summarize the old man's version of his wonderful idea.

Few New Englanders of mature age at the period in which this stage of our story lies were exempt from the haunting opinion that somewhere along the almost interminable coast line from Calias to Hell Gate, Captain Kidd had buried treasures, which were never accepted below hundreds of thousands in value. Many had been the fruitless surveys, as many the toilsome excavations, but there was little decline of belief in the legend. Mr. Shrouds had himself been engaged in this search but the stress of daily demands, to say nothing of the incessant devotion of Deb had given him little opportunity to work out the realization of a faith which never wavered. In the course of his investigations, he had discovered a rough chart or plan of some kind which assumed to be the original and only design of the burial place of his riches made by the redoubtable pirate himself. Having settled this point, the rest was easy. The circles and arrowheads and indelible scrawls upon the plan were interpreted by the old man to denote that the treasure had been hidden in this old town of East Greenwood, and astonishing fact, upon the site of this very warehouse. Calvin, keen by intuition, study and practice to turn the effects of things facing the cause, saw readily in the old man's theory a deduction from experience. Shrouds had hidden treasures near that spot, why may not Kidd have done so?

"But," continued the narrator, "let that matter go for the present. Whether it is true or not is not the main point in my skeem, but the money, if found, would help to kerri it eout, for them old Spanish pistereens was good silver, while we hev got to adulteratin' our coin so that in time nobody will take it. My plan is this: Next year the hull world will come to Fillydelfy to the big fair and change'll be in demand then. If I get the silver, I know how an' where I get it melted and minted into Uncle Sam's dollars."

"You forget," said Calvin, "that congress a couple of years ago enacted a law that no more silver dollars shall be coined."

"Forget nothin'. I can tell you more about that demonization of the good old dollar than you know a blamed sight. I should be sure to coin no dollars later than 1873."

"But," persisted Calvin, "you would be liable, as a counterfeiter, to arrest and punishment."

"Let us see, let us see. The silver dollar that was weighed 412½ grains,

nine-tenths fine; that means 371¼ grains of pure silver. Silver is worth now 56½ pence in London, say a trifle over 111 cents an ounce. Buy 480 grains pure silver for \$1.11, put 371¼ grains in a dollar and hev 108¼ grains left. But silver is higher now than it will be again for twenty years. As soon as the British heard the congress had passed the bill to resume specie payment in 1879, silver popped up. By the middle of next year it will fall to 52 pence or a trifle over \$1.03, so a dollar in gold'll buy enough silver to make a silver dollar, and hev nearly 2.9 of a dollar left. Or take it this way: Ten dollars an' 30 cents'll buy ten ounces of pure silver; ten ounces of pure silver'll make \$12 an' over eight-ninths of another, so that with the "toleration" system they hev in the mint, we can safely call it \$13 for ten-thirty, see?"

"Then there is the alloy," observed Calvin.

"Yes, there is the alloy nickel, mostly cheap an' easily fused, easy enough to make the cost of the alloy and the mintage eout of the bullion an' keep honest, too. Oh, I know, for I hev done sumthin' at it afore."

"But all this does not meet the main question," Calvin insisted. "Would not such business be deemed actionable?"

"Why?" asked the old man. "Every dollar'd hev the full amount of value in it the law requires it to hev; there would be nothin' base abeaut it. You might mint it up an' 'twould yield back everything an' the alloy."

"But the stamp 'United States of America?' I presume you would have that upon your dollars?"

"To be sure," said the old man, "to be sure, motto, eagle, arrow, an' all, why not? The government hasn't forbid anybody makin' copies of United States coin, not yit. Why neow, if the gov'nment will be so dogon mean as to knock eout the dollar we hev had ever since the country began, because the gold brokers demanded it, I'm goin' to help the people eout. If Uncle Sam's gone eout of the business of makin' money for the people, Uncle Habakkuk'll take it up, Selah!"

"Well, find your treasure, and then we can discuss the policy of coining United States money," answered Calvin, somewhat listlessly, and the subject of free silver coinage and private mintage of public money was at once dismissed from discourse. It had proved too heavy for Nettie who slept soundly through the most of it on her chair, and for Calvin, who followed his host above and with him took an observation of the weather the night was likely to bring.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HEIR OF HUMANITIES.

It was almost night again, although the subterranean room in which Shrouds and his guests were seated, required at all hours of day and night the light of a lamp to render its darkness visible. The oft-replenished fire in the great, cavernous chimney-place, illuminated the apartment almost back to the wall, where just at the outskirts of the torrid rays of the crackling flame stood a table with the lamp upon it. Here Nettie often sat. Just now she looked up from a bit of needlework which she had contrived, womanlike, to bring with her, and said demurely to her husband:

"Charles, don't you think that we know each other less when married than any other couple you ever heard of?"

"With one exception, possibly," the